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LOLLARDS

though their master had been condemned by the Bishops, the Bishops had been condemned by God. It was on May 19 that the theses were pronounced to be \* heresies and errors.' About two o'clock that afternoon, while the churchmen were sitting round the table at the pious work, the house was shaken by a terrible earthquake that struck with panic all present except the stern and zealous Courtenay. He insisted that his subordinates should resume their seats and go on with the business, although the shock appears to have been more violent than is usual in our country, casting down pinnacles and steeples, and shaking stones out of castle walls. It took away from this solemn act of censure some at least of the effect on which the Bishops had calculated, and "Wycliffe did not let pass the opportunity to point the moral. Such an omen was no light thing in such an age.<sup>1</sup>

Strengthened by this decision of the Church against his enemies, Courtenay appealed to the secular power. He had learnt by bitter experience four years back that, unless the King's arm is stretched against the heretic, the Bishop curses but in vain. The prelates had agreed to root out heresy in Oxford, but if the University authorities should defy them, they had no force of their own sufficient to compel the students to obey. They had decided that each Bishop was to arrest unlicensed preachers in his own diocese, but such arrests would be few and hazardous, unless the sheriff's men supported the Summoner. Courtenay's appeal for help was readily answered. A short Parliament had sat from May 7 to 22, and during the last few days of its session an ordinance was framed by King and Lords, after the departure, or at least during the absence, of the Commons. It was ordained that for the future, if complaint against some heretic was lodged by the Bishops in the Court of Chancery, orders should be sent to the King's officers and sheriffs to arrest him on behalf of the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Before the prolonged and doubtful contest between the Church and the new missionaries began in country districts, a sudden and successful blow was struck at the head-quarters

» *ffasc. Z.* 272; *Pol. Poems*, i.  
251 and 254;  
Hadden, ix. 4 *Rot.*  
*Parl.*, iii.